

# Prophecies of the Messiah

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn argues that the Bible contains genuine prophecies about a coming Messiah that were accurately fulfilled in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.*

## The Place of His Birth

Biblical prophecy is a fascinating subject. It not only includes predictions of events that are still in the future. It also includes predictions of events that were future at the time the prophecy was given, but which have now been fulfilled and are part of the past. This latter category includes all the prophecies about a coming Messiah that Christians believe were accurately fulfilled in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If the Bible really does contain such prophecies, then we would seem to have evidence that's at least consistent with the divine inspiration of the Bible. One can see how an all-knowing God could accurately foretell the future, but it's not clear how a finite human being could do so. Thus, if there are accurately fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, then we have yet another reason to believe that the biblical worldview is true.



Let's begin with a prophecy about the Messiah's birthplace. "Messiah" is a Hebrew term that simply means "anointed one." When translated into Greek, the language of the New Testament, the term becomes "Christ." Christians believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Mark 14:61-62).

In Micah 5:2 we read, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though

you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” This prophecy was given in the eighth century B.C., more than seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus!

Notice, first, that it refers to a future ruler who will come from the town of Bethlehem. When King Herod, shortly after Jesus’ birth, asked the Jewish religious leaders where the Christ (or Messiah) was to be born, they told him that he was to be born in Bethlehem and cited this verse from Micah as support (Matt. 2:1-6). Both Matthew and Luke confirm that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1 and Luke 2:4-7). So He clearly meets this necessary qualification for being the promised Messiah.

But that’s not all. Micah also says that the origins of this ruler are “from of old, from ancient times.” How should we understand this? One commentator notes, “The terms ‘old’ . . . and ‘ancient times’ . . . may denote ‘great antiquity’ as well as ‘eternity’ in the strictest sense.”<sup>{1}</sup> Dr. Allen Ross states, “At the least this means that Messiah was pre-existent; at the most it means He is eternal.”<sup>{2}</sup> Micah’s prophecy thus suggests that the Messiah will be a supernatural, perhaps even divine, person. And this astonishing conclusion is precisely what Jesus claimed for Himself!<sup>{3}</sup>

## **The Time of His Appearing**

Let’s now consider a fascinating prophecy that, in the opinion of many scholars, tells us when the Messiah would make His appearance. It’s found in Daniel 9.

Daniel was one of the Jewish captives who had been brought to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The prophecy in Daniel 9 was given in the sixth century B.C. While much can be said about

this passage, we must focus on a few important points.

To begin, verse 24 gives us the time parameters during which the prophecy will unfold. It reads, "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin," and so on. Although we can't go into all the details, the 'seventy 'sevens'" concern seventy distinct seven-year periods of time, or a total of 490 years.

Next, verse 25 tells us that from the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Messiah, there will be a total of sixty-nine "sevens," or 483 years. There are two views we must consider. The first holds that this decree was issued by the Persian ruler Artaxerxes to Ezra the priest in 457 B.C.{4} Adding 483 years to this date brings us to A.D. 27, the year many scholars believe Jesus began His public ministry! The second view holds that the reference is to a later decree of Artaxerxes, issued on March 5, 444 B.C.{5} Adding 483 years to this date takes us to A.D. 38. But according to this view, the years in question should be calculated according to a lunar calendar, consisting of twelve thirty-day months.{6} If each of the 483 years consists of only 360 days, then we arrive at March 30, 33 A.D. Dr. Allen Ross says "that is the Monday of the Passion week, the day of the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem." {7} The views thus differ on the date of Jesus' death, but each can comfortably fit the evidence.{8}

Finally, verse 26 says that after the period of sixty-nine "sevens" the Messiah will be "cut off" and have nothing. According to one scholar, "The word translated 'cut off' is used of executing . . . a criminal." {9} All of this fits quite well with the crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed, the accuracy of this prophecy, written over five hundred years before Jesus' birth, bears eloquent testimony to the divine inspiration and truth of the Bible.

# The Nature of His Ministry

In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses told the Israelites, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” This verse promised a succession of prophets who would speak God’s words to the people. Ultimately, however, it refers to Jesus Christ. One commentator notes that the Messianic interpretation of this passage is mentioned not only in the New Testament, but also among the Essenes, Jews, Gnostics, and others.[{10}](#) Peter explicitly applied this passage to Jesus in one of his sermons (Acts 3:22-23).

But not only was the Messiah to be a great prophet, it was also foretold that he would be a priest and king as well. The prophet Zechariah was told to make a royal crown and symbolically set it on the head of Joshua, the high priest. The Lord then said, “Here is the man whose name is the Branch . . . he will . . . sit and rule on his throne. And . . . be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two” (Zechariah 6:12-13). ‘The title “Branch” is a messianic title.’[{11}](#) So the scene symbolizes the future Messiah, here referred to as “the Branch,” uniting the offices of king and priest in one person.

But why is it important that the Messiah be a priest? As a prophet he speaks God’s word to the people. As a king he rules from his throne. But why must he also be a priest? “Because priests dealt with sin,” says Michael Brown, a Christian scholar who is ethnically Jewish. “Priests bore the iniquities of the people on their shoulders.”[{12}](#) And this, of course, is precisely what Jesus did for us: “He . . . bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24).

Dr. Brown points to a tradition in the Talmud that says that on the Day of Atonement there were three signs that the animal sacrifices offered by the high priest had been accepted by God. According to this tradition, in the forty years prior to

the temple's destruction in A.D. 70, all three signs turned up negative every single time.<sup>{13}</sup> Dr. Brown comments, "Jesus probably was crucified in A.D. 30, and the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70."<sup>{14}</sup> So during this forty-year period God signaled that he no longer accepted these sacrifices. Why? Because final atonement had been made by Jesus!<sup>{15}</sup>

## The Significance of His Death

Without any doubt, one of the most astonishing prophecies about the promised Messiah is found in Isaiah 52-53. The verses were written about seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus. They largely concern the death of the Lord's "Suffering Servant." According to many scholars, a careful comparison of this passage with the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus' suffering and death reveals too many similarities to be merely coincidental.

In some of the most-cited verses from this intriguing passage we read: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:5-6). Here we have a vivid depiction of substitutionary atonement. The Lord lays upon His servant "the iniquity of us all" and punishes him "for our transgressions." In other words, God's servant dies as a substitute in our place. This is precisely what Jesus claimed for himself, saying, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The parallels between Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" and Jesus are certainly impressive. But some scholars have suggested that Isaiah's "servant" is actually the nation of Israel and not the Messiah. Dr. Michael Brown dismisses this notion

however, insisting that 'nowhere in the . . . foundational, authoritative Jewish writings do we find the interpretation that this passage refers to the nation of Israel. References to the servant as a people actually end with Isaiah 48:20.'" {16} What's more, he says, "Many . . . Jewish interpreters . . . had no problem seeing this passage as referring to the Messiah . . . By the sixteenth century, Rabbi Moshe Alshech said, 'Our rabbis with one voice accept and affirm . . . that the prophet is speaking of the Messiah, and we shall . . . also adhere to the same view.'" {17}

For his part, Dr. Brown is so convinced that this passage prophetically depicts the suffering and death of Jesus that he feels "as if God would have to apologize to the human race and to the Jewish people for putting this passage into the scriptures" if Jesus is not the one in view! {18} Although this is a strong statement, it's not unjustified. For Isaiah 53 not only foretells the death of God's servant for the sins of the people, it also implies his resurrection!

## **The Mystery of His Resurrection**

In the opinion of many scholars, Isaiah 53 not only foretells the death of God's servant; it also implies his resurrection from the dead!

It's important to notice that Isaiah 53 makes it absolutely clear that the Messiah is put to death. It says that "he was cut off from the land of the living" (v. 8), and that 'he poured out his life unto death" (v. 12). On the other hand, however, it also says that 'he will see his offspring and prolong his days" (v. 10), and that after his suffering "he will see the light of life and be satisfied" (v. 11). So the text teaches both that the Messiah will die and that he will live again. And although the passage doesn't explicitly teach the Messiah's resurrection, it's certainly consistent with it. This is really staggering in light of the compelling

historical evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus!{19}

Let's now pause to consider what we've learned in this brief article. Micah 5:2 teaches that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Also, by teaching the preexistence, or even eternality, of the Messiah, the prophecy suggests that he'll be a supernatural, possibly even divine, figure. In Daniel 9:24-27 we saw that the Messiah would appear to Israel sometime around A.D. 27 – 33, precisely the time of Jesus' public ministry! Deuteronomy and Zechariah teach that the Messiah would minister as prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet, Jesus spoke God's word to the people. As a priest, he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. And while he didn't reign as king during his first advent, he was called "the king of the Jews" (Matt. 27:11, 37). And Christians believe that he's in some sense reigning now from heaven and that he'll one day reign on earth as well (Luke 1:32-33). Finally, Isaiah 53 teaches that the Messiah would die for our sins—and then somehow live again. This is consistent with the New Testament's record of Jesus' substitutionary death and bodily resurrection.

Of course, we've not been able to consider all the prophecies. But hopefully enough has been said to conclude with Dr. Brown that if Jesus isn't the Messiah, "there will never be a Messiah. It's too late for anyone else. It's him or no one." {20} Well, you've now heard the evidence; the verdict is up to you.

## Notes

1. Thomas E. McComiskey, "Micah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 427.
2. Allen Ross, "Messianic Prophecies," at [www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=2764](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2764). Accessed on September 6, 2007.



3. See, for example, Matthew 11:27; John 8:58 and 10:30.
4. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 114. See also Ezra 7:11-26.
5. J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 1362. See also Nehemiah 2:1-8.
6. See, for example, the discussion in Ross, "Messianic Prophecies," at [www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=2764](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2764). Accessed on September 6, 2007.
7. Ibid.
8. The first holds that He was crucified in A.D. 30, the second in A.D. 33.
9. Pentecost, "Daniel," 1364.
10. Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 122.
11. F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 1558. See also Zechariah 3:8.
12. Michael Brown, interviewed in Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Advance Reader Copy) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 199.
13. See Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39a.
14. Brown, interviewed in Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 201.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 213.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 212.
19. For a defense of this important claim, please see some of the excellent articles by William Lane Craig at [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org). For more scriptural support, please compare Peter's sermon in Acts 2:22-36 with Psalm 16:8-11.
20. Brown, interviewed in Strobel, *The Case for the Real*



# The Uniqueness of Jesus

*Is Jesus the only way to heaven? The Gospels lead to one of three conclusions about Jesus Christ: He was either a liar, a lunatic, or truly Lord.*

## **Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?**

A serious study of the Gospels leads a person to one of three conclusions about Jesus: He was (1) an evil lying villain, (2) a preposterously deluded madman, or (3) the Messiah, the Son of God. It is ludicrous for anyone who has studied His life to take the position that He was simply a good teacher. Only one of the three conclusions is a logical possibility.

Jesus made some outrageous claims no ordinary person would dare to make. First, He claimed to be God. His statements of equality with God meant He believed that He possessed the authority, attributes, and adoration belonging to God. He proclaimed authority over creation, forgiveness of sins, and life and death. He declared to possess the attributes of God. He emphatically stated that He was the source of truth and the only way to eternal life. Only Jesus among the significant leaders of history made such claims.

Here are a few of His outrageous claims. When "Philip said, Lord, show us the Father.' Jesus answered. . . .Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father'" (John 14:8-9). Once, when the Pharisees were disparaging Jesus and challenging Him, Jesus responded, " I and the Father are one.' Again the Jews picked

up stones to stone Him, but Jesus said to them, I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God'" (John 10:30-33). It is clear in these two statements, Jesus claimed to be God. His opponents clearly understood His declaration of equality with God.

When challenged by the scholars on His authority over Abraham, the father of the Jews, Jesus replied, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.' The Jews said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!' I tell you the truth,' Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am!'" (John 8:56-58). Jesus clearly believed He had existed two thousand years earlier and knew Abraham.

On the issue of life and death Jesus stated, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25). Here He believed He had authority over life and death.

Finally, Jesus accepted and encouraged others to worship Him. Throughout the Gospels the disciples worshiped Jesus as seen in Matthew 14:33 and John 9:38. Jesus states in John 5:22-23, "Moreover, the Father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him." Jesus knew the Old Testament command "Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Matt. 4:10). Despite this, Jesus encouraged others to worship Him. Either He was mad (insane), or He was who He claimed to be and deserves our worship as God incarnate.

After reading such claims, it is impossible for anyone to say He was merely a good teacher. A man making claims like these must either be a diabolical liar, insane, or God incarnate. For the remainder of this essay we will be discussing which of

these conclusions is most plausible.

## **A Villain, A Madman, or God Incarnate?**

We have established at this point that Jesus made some astounding claims about himself. He presumed to be God, claimed the authority and attributes of God, and encouraged others to worship Him as God. If, however, Jesus was a liar, then He knew His message was false but was willing to deceive thousands with claims He knew were untrue. That is, Jesus knew that He was not God, He did not know the way to eternal life, and He died and sent thousands to their deaths for a message He knew was a lie. This would make Jesus history's greatest villain (and perhaps, a demon) for teaching this wicked lie. He would have also been history's greatest fool for it was these claims that lead Him to His death.

Few, if any, seriously hold to this position. Even the skeptics unanimously agree that He was at least a great moral teacher. William Lecky, one of Britain's most respected historians and an opponent of Christianity writes, "It was reserved for Christianity to present the world an ideal character which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love."[\[1\]](#)

However, it would be inconsistent and illogical to believe that Jesus was a great moral teacher if some of those teachings contained immoral lies about himself. He would have to be a stupendous hypocrite to teach others honesty and virtue and all the while preach the lie that He was God. It is inconceivable to think that such deceitful, selfish, and depraved acts could have issued forth from the same being who otherwise maintained from the beginning to the end the purest and noblest character known in history.

Since the liar conclusion is not logical, let us assume He really believed He was God but was mistaken. If He truly believed He had created the world, had seen Abraham two

thousand years before, and had authority over death, and yet none of this was true, we can only conclude that He was mad or insane.

However, when you study the life of Jesus, He clearly does not display the characteristics of insanity. The abnormality and imbalance we find in a deranged person are not there. His teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount, remain one of the greatest works ever recorded. Jesus was continually challenged by the Pharisees and lawyers, highly educated men whose modern day equivalent would be our university professors. They were fluent in several languages and were known for their scholarship of the Old Testament and Jewish law. They challenged Jesus with some of the most profound questions of their day and Jesus' quick answers amazed and silenced them. In the face of tremendous pressure, we find He exemplified the greatest composure.

For these reasons, the lunatic argument is not consistent. If both the liar and the lunatic options are not consistent with the facts, we must take a serious look at the third option: that Jesus was really God. The next question is, does He prove to have the credentials of God? Let us investigate this possibility.

## **Messianic Prophecy**

Thus far we have learned that Jesus is unique among all men for the profound statements He made about His divinity. We concluded that it is impossible to state He was simply a good moral teacher. From His amazing statements, He must be a liar, a lunatic, or God. Since the first two were not conceivable, we will begin looking at the third alternative, that He really is God. First, we must see if He had the credentials for these claims.

One of the most incredible types of evidence is the testimony of prophecy. The Old Testament contains a number of messianic

prophecies made centuries before Christ appeared on the earth. The fact that He fulfilled each one is powerful testimony that He was no ordinary man. Allow me to illustrate this point using eight prophecies.

- *Genesis 12:1-3 states the Messiah would come from the seed of Abraham.*
- *Genesis 49:10 states that He would be of the tribe of Judah.*
- *2 Samuel 7:12 states that Messiah would be of the line of King David.*
- *Micah 5:2 states that He would be born in the city of Bethlehem.*
- *Daniel 9:24 states He would die or be "cut off" exactly 483 years after the declaration to reconstruct the temple in 444 B.C.*
- *Isaiah 53 states that the Messiah would die with thieves, then be buried in a richman's tomb.*
- *Psalms 22:16 states upon His death His hands and His feet would be pierced. This is quite significant since Roman crucifixion had not been invented at the time the Psalmist was writing.*
- *Isaiah 49:7 states that Messiah would be known and hated by the entire nation. Not many men become known by their entire nation, and even less are despised by the entire nation.*

Now calculate the possibility of someone fulfilling these by coincidence. Let us suppose you estimate there is a one in a hundred chance a man could fulfill just one of these prophecies by chance. That would mean when all eight are put together there is a 1/10 to the 16th power probability that they were fulfilled by chance. Mathematician Peter Stoner

estimates 1/10 to the 17th power possibility that these prophecies were fulfilled by chance.[{2}](#) Mathematicians have estimated that the possibility of sixteen of these prophecies being fulfilled by chance are about 1/10 to the 45th power.[{3}](#) That's a decimal point followed by 44 zeroes and a 1! These figures show it is extremely improbable that these prophecies could have been fulfilled by accident. The figures for fulfillment of the 109 major prophecies are staggering.[{4}](#)

Skeptics have objected to the testimony of prophecy, stating they were written after the times of Jesus and therefore fulfill themselves. However, the evidence overwhelmingly shows these prophecies were clearly written centuries before Christ. It is an established fact even by liberal scholars that the Old Testament canon was completed by 450 B.C. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, was completed in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus in 250 B.C. The Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1948 contained the books of the Old Testament. Prophetic books like Isaiah were dated by paleographers to be written in 100 B.C.[{5}](#) Once again, these prophecies were confirmed to have been written centuries before Christ, and no religious leader has fulfilled anything close to the number of prophecies Jesus has fulfilled.

## **Confirmation of Miracles**

Jesus made some profound statements about His divinity. We concluded that it is impossible to state He was simply a good moral teacher. From His amazing statements we must conclude Him to be a liar, a lunatic, or God. Since the first two were not conceivable, we began looking at the third alternative. If this is true, we must see if He has the credentials for His claims.

If a person claimed to be God, we would expect supernatural confirmations. We've already discovered the phenomenal record of prophecy. We would also expect Him to demonstrate authority over nature, sickness, truth, sin, and death. Jesus

demonstrated such authority. One line of evidence is seen in His miraculous deeds.

Jesus' miracles demonstrated His power over creation, sickness, and death. He demonstrated His authority over nature in such miracles as walking on water (Matt. 14:25), multiplying bread (Matt. 14:15-21), and calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41). He demonstrated authority over sickness with His instantaneous healings over terminal diseases. His healings did not take weeks or days but were instantaneous. He healed blindness (John 9), paralysis (Mark 2), leprosy (Luke 17), and deafness (Mark 7). Such miracles cannot be attributed to psychosomatic healing but to one who rules over creation. Jesus displayed authority over death by raising the dead as recorded in Luke 7 and Matthew 9.

Some doubt whether these miracles occurred. Several view the miracle accounts as fictitious legends developed after the death of Christ. Philosopher David Hume argued that human nature tends to gossip and exaggerate the truth. Others argue that the miracle accounts were propagated in distant lands by the followers of Christ well after the events so that the miracle accounts could not have been verified due to distance and time.

There are several arguments against these attacks. First, the Bible has proven to be a historically reliable document. For more information on this, see the [Authority of the Bible](#) article. Second, legends and exaggerations develop when followers travel to distant lands well after the time of the events and tell of stories which cannot be confirmed. Legends usually develop generations after the death of the figure at which time it is impossible to verify any of the accounts since all available witnesses are not available. However, the miracle accounts of Jesus were being told in the very cities in which they occurred during the lifetime of Jesus and to those who witnessed the event(s). Those who witnessed the miracles were followers of Christ and His enemies. These eye



witnesses were questioned carefully by those in authority. If any claims were exaggerated or distorted, it could have easily been refuted. The New Testament with its miracle accounts could not have survived had not the accounts been true.

German scholar Dr. Carsten Theide and British scholar Dr. Matthew D'Ancona in their book *Eyewitness to Jesus* state their conclusion after a scientific investigation of a fragment from the Gospel of Matthew. The scientific evidence revealed that the book was written before A.D. 70, possibly as early as A.D. 30.<sup>[6]</sup> This reveals the fact that the Gospels were written and circulated during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, who were then able to judge the accuracy of such accounts, and they were unable to refute Jesus' miracles. None of the world's religious leaders performed the miracles Jesus did.

## Authority Over Death

A study of the claims of Jesus make it clear that He was professing to be God. It is then impossible to conclude that He was merely a good teacher. In light of these claims, one must conclude that He is a liar, a lunatic, or He is Lord. We investigated to see if His claim to be God was substantiated. Clearly the record of prophecy proved there was something unique about Him. The miracles He performed remain unequalled by anyone, but Jesus' greatest demonstration of authority is revealed in His power over sin and death.

There are many religions and religious leaders who claim to know what lies beyond the grave. The problem is, no one has demonstrated authority over the grave or confirmed their belief of what happens after death. Only Jesus demonstrated authority over death. All men have died, but Jesus is alive.

During His three-year ministry, Jesus exercised His authority over death by raising several people from the grave. Most notable is the account of Lazarus found in John 11. Here even in the face of His enemies, Jesus raised Lazarus from the

grave. If this were not a historical account, this story would not have survived since it was recorded and propagated in the very city where it occurred, in the lifetime of the witnesses, both followers and enemies of Christ. The enemies of Christianity could have easily refuted the account if it were not true. The fact is they could not refute it.

In regard to His own death and resurrection, the Old Testament predicted the death of the Messiah in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. However, it also predicts the resurrection in Psalm 16:8 11 and refers to the eternal reign of the Messiah. The only way to reconcile these verses is a resurrected Messiah.

Jesus himself made these predictions in regard to His resurrection: "Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up" (John 2:19). In Mark 8:31 Jesus taught "that the son of Man must suffer many things . . . and be killed, and after three days rise again." In John 10:18 Jesus states, "I have authority to lay it (My life) down, and I have authority to take it up again." In these passages, Jesus predicts His own death and resurrection. Either Jesus was mad, or He really had the authority over death.

Jesus' resurrection proved His authority over sin and death. For a more detailed defense of the historicity of the Resurrection, check the Probe perspective on the Resurrection titled, [Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

At the beginning of this study we examined the claims of Christ. We realized only three conclusions were possible: liar, lunatic, or Lord. Since the first two were inconceivable, we needed to see if Christ could further confirm His credentials of being God. We discovered that His claims were confirmed by the record of prophecy, His miracles, and the Resurrection.

Jesus proves himself to be unique among all men.

*Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the*

*central figure for much of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as this "One Solitary Life."*[{7}](#)

## Notes

1. William Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (New York: D.Appleton and Company, 1903), p. 8.
2. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernadino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, 1979), p. 167.
3. Norman Geisler, *When Skeptics Ask* (Wheaton, Ill.:Victor Press, 1990), p. 116.
4. Tim LaHaye, *Jesus, Who is He?* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Books, 1996), p. 176.
5. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), pp. 365-66.
6. Peter Carsten Theide and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 163.
7. Anonymous, "One Solitary Life," quoted in Tim LaHaye, *Jesus, Who is He?*, p. 68.

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## Israel's History Written in Advance

According to an old story, the powerful Prussian King Frederick the Great had a chaplain who was a Bible-believer, though Frederick himself was a rationalist. One day, Frederick challenged his chaplain, "In a word, give me a good argument

for the God of the Bible.” His chaplain, a knowledgeable man, responded, “The Jew, your majesty!” To unpack the chaplain’s concise remark is the purpose of this essay.

## **Neglected Evidence for the God of the Bible**

The history of the Jews is a demonstration of God at work, sometimes miraculously, sometimes providentially, in the affairs of men and nations. The particular significance of the Jews—in contrast to other nations—is that God called Israel His special people and made covenants with them through Abraham, Moses, and David. In addition, the Old Testament predicts what God planned to do with His people. We’ll look at three rather wide-ranging prophecies about the nation Israel and see how they have come to pass. These involve first, the covenant curses; second, an acted parable of the marital relations between God and Israel; and finally, a prediction of Israel’s return to her own land.

The first area of prophecy involves what God promised to do to the nation of Israel if they did not keep the laws Moses had given them from Mt. Sinai.

When the Israelites were rescued from slavery in Egypt about 1,400 B.C., God made a contract or covenant with Moses to define Israel’s relationship to Him as His own special people. This covenant reminded them of what God had already done for them and what He promised to do in the future. God had saved them from slavery, brought them safely through the desert, was about to bring them into possession of the land of Canaan, and would protect them from all disasters if they would be faithful to Him. To test their faithfulness, God gave them an elaborate set of laws—some moral, some civil, some ceremonial—which also set them apart from the nations around them. God showed His reality through the lifestyle that He had designed for Israel. In Deuteronomy 4:5-8 Moses explained it:

*See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'*

Moses goes on to say only Israel has a God who is near when they pray, and only His people have such righteous laws to guide them.

In the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy and the 26th chapter of Leviticus, the provisions of the covenant are set out in the form of blessings and curses—blessings if Israel would obey God's commands and curses if they disobeyed. Through these sanctions, Israel would be reminded of how they were doing in obeying God, and their neighbors would see an objective demonstration of God's judgment in history.

## **Israel as a History Lesson**

Israel's history demonstrates that when they broke the laws God gave them, they experienced exactly the results God predicted would happen if they were unfaithful. No other nation has prophesied its own downfall with such accuracy. Thus history demonstrates how accurately God predicted what would happen to Israel if they disobeyed His laws. And what did God predict? To summarize nearly a hundred verses, Israel's disobedience brought wasted effort in labors; natural disasters such as drought, blight, and locusts to their crops; and disease and death to their animals and themselves.

Their enemies would defeat them in battle and besiege their cities, resulting in plague, famine, cannibalism, and starvation. They would be scattered to foreign countries. There some would die; others would live in constant fear of both real and imagined disasters, or turn to other gods. They

would be sold as slaves. Their numbers would decline greatly, as they suffered from fearful plagues, prolonged disasters, and lingering illnesses. What an amazing list of disasters!

Not only are these curses severe, but the Bible predicts them in some detail. In Deuteronomy, fourteen verses describe the blessings and fifty-four the curses. In Leviticus, eleven verses are blessings and thirty-two are curses. Altogether, over 75 percent of the verses concern curses for disobedience. God- predicted disasters will be a major part of Israel's future.

This proportion is very unusual. Other religious people might concede that their own history had been three-fourths disaster, but who would admit it had been three-fourths disobedient? And this proportion is borne out not only by the history of Israel recorded in the Bible, where one might claim the biblical history writers either molded the narrative to match the prophecy or adjusted the prophecy to match the history. It is also demonstrated in the long history of disaster experienced by the Jews after the Bible was written.

No other national group has experienced such disaster as the Jews. Most nations have not survived long enough to experience so much disaster! Yet Israel has experienced disaster at every point sketched in the long lists of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They have, unfortunately, been persecuted again and again for over two thousand years. For most of that time they were without a national homeland, having been driven out of Palestine. They have faced decimation and sometimes genocide from nearly every group they have lived among: Greeks, Romans, Christians, Muslims, Nazis, and Communists. Even now the recently re-established nation of Israel faces continual harassment and threats of annihilation from hostile forces all around her.

In the midst of these curses, however, comes a promise that Israel will not be totally destroyed.



*Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God (Lev. 26:44).*

But as predicted, the Jews still exist as a people today. “Of course!” you say. “If Israel had been destroyed, we would never have heard of them.” Not true – unless they had been destroyed before the coming of Jesus. With the rise of Christianity, the Old Testament was preserved by non-Jews and would have survived whether the Jews survived or not. In fact, many of the threats the Jews have faced came in the past two thousand years. Yet Israel, unlike most oppressed nations of antiquity, has survived as a distinct people.

Thus the evidence from Israel’s predicted covenant curses points to God’s activity in history, keeping His words of both judgment and promise.

## **Israel’s Harlotry**

It’s easy to miss the book of Hosea in the Old Testament. But it describes an amazing parable that would picture Israel’s situation for some two thousand years. The prophet Hosea was divinely directed to live out a powerful parable depicting God’s relationship with Israel.

In chapter 1, Hosea is instructed to marry a harlot, Gomer, and have children. He obeys, thereby picturing God’s choice of the nation Israel for a personal relationship with Him, even though Abraham was an idolater when God called him and the Israelites were idolaters when they were called out of slavery in Egypt.

In chapter 2, Gomer runs off with her lovers. In the same way, Israel abandoned God for the more sexually exciting worship of the Canaanites, even though God had brought the people safely into the promised land. Finally Gomer winds up in slavery, as

Israel would later be taken captive to Assyria and Babylon.

In chapter 3, Hosea is directed to go and buy her back. But she is to have no relations with Hosea or with her lovers. This last event in Hosea's living parable is a prediction of the status of Israel for a long time to come:

*For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king . . . in the last days (Hos. 3:4-5).*

Hosea predicted that Israel for "many days" will lack a king, even though God had promised that Israel would never lack a descendant to sit on the throne if the nation was obedient to God.

In fact, the prediction states that Israel will lack even a prince. Since in Hebrew, "prince" means a government official, not the son of the king, Israel would lack both government and king.

Hosea also predicts that sacrifice, pillar, ephod, household idols will be lacking. Two are associated with the sacrificial system and two with idolatry. Sacrifice was an integral part of Israel's covenant and worship. The ephod, a sort of vest, was one of the most important of the ceremonial garments worn by Israel's high priest. Although some pillars had orthodox uses, the most common reference is to those used in Canaanite worship. Israel was to lose both true worship and the false religion which had been such a problem since it entered Canaan.

This has happened exactly! Since A.D. 44 (the death of Herod Agrippa I), Israel has had no native king to this day. For 1,878 years, from the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to the formation of the modern nation in 1948, Israel had no

government of its own either. Thus the predictions regarding Israel's governmental status were fulfilled in detail.

With the loss of the Temple and the priestly garments came the end of the sacrificial system. Israel has not had a high priest to this day. So Hosea's prophecy about the loss of sacrificial worship has also proved true.

From A.D. 70 to 1948, the "sons of Israel" lacked all six items predicted in Hosea 3:4. Now they have a government, but five are still lacking. Hosea 3:4 has been literally fulfilled.

## **A Regathering of Israel?**

In our own generation we may also be seeing the fulfillment of Hosea 3:5. Many Jews have physically returned to Palestine in this century. If their seeking of "God and David their king" is understood as a turning to Jesus as the true Messiah, we can point to the growing Messianic Jewish movement which has flourished in the past two decades. But we are still too close to these events to be sure.

Whether or not Hosea 3:5 refers to Israel's return to the promised land, a number of other Old Testament passages do. Let's look at one such passage, Isaiah 11:11-16. Verse 11 reads:

*Then it will happen on that day that the LORD will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.*

Sometime after Isaiah wrote these words, Israel was to be regathered to its homeland. The reference to a "second time" as well as the places from which they would return suggests that this is not the return from the Babylonian exile.

According to the whole passage, several significant features will characterize this return. First, verse 13 suggests that Israel will no longer be two nations as it was after Solomon's time, but a single unified country. Second, Israel will fight the surrounding nations (the Philistines, the Edomites, The Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Egyptians) as a part of this return (vv. 14-15). Third, something spectacular will happen to dry up the "tongue of the sea of Egypt" and the "River," presumably the Euphrates (v.15). Fourth, the places from which the return will take place are explicitly named, except for the general phrase "islands [or 'coastlands'] of the sea" (v.11).

Of these four items, three have already occurred in the return of Jews to Israel in our own generation; only the third has not yet taken place.

The return of Jews to Palestine and the formation of a state of their own is amazing in itself, given that just a century ago the territory was controlled by the Muslim Turks who hated the Jews. Yet a world Zionist movement was formed; the land came under the control of Britain at the end of World War I; Britain allowed the Jews to have a homeland; the Nazi holocaust drove Jews to Palestine who otherwise would have stayed in Europe; the United Nations agreed to partition Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state; and the Jews were able to defeat a coalition of Arab states bent on their destruction.

The Jewish state formed in 1948 in Palestine included persons descended from both the northern and southern tribes. The enmity of the divided kingdoms that existed at Isaiah's time has, in fact, been healed.

Israel has already fought with all the surrounding nations, in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. Though the Philistines, Edomites, and such are no longer identifiable as separate peoples, the Arab nations occupying their lands (and most likely including

some of their descendants) are Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria. These were the nations Israel fought and dispossessed to regain its territory.

Once again, the prophecies of the Bible about the Jews show the God of the Bible to be true.

In this essay we have examined three significant passages in the Bible that predict the history of Israel. We have shown that numerous prophecies from the Old Testament regarding Israel have been fulfilled. We have made the following observations:

1. The Jews would have fierce and repeated persecution and disaster. This has been characteristic of the nation for two thousand years.

2. In spite of such disasters, the Jews would continue to exist as a recognizable people group, in spite of treatment which has destroyed other such people groups.

3. Israel would be without a king for a long period of time. Israel has been without a king for nearly two thousand years, though a Davidic royal dynasty was an important part of the Old Testament revelation.

4. Israel would lack government officials for a long time. Now, after almost 1,850 years, the Jews have them again.

5. Israel would lack sacrifice and ephod, both associated with God's commands at Mt. Sinai. This has been true for nearly two thousand years and is quite surprising in view of how important sacrifice and the priesthood were in the Old Testament.

6. Israel would lack pillar and idols. This seems obvious today, because the Jews so adamantly worship one God, but the situation was rather different when Hosea made the prediction about 800 B.C.

7. Israel would return to its land as a single united nation. A century ago, such an event would have seemed almost impossible. Palestine was controlled by a Muslim government which had no interest in providing a homeland, much less an independent state, for the Jews. Yet it has come to pass!

8. The countries explicitly named in Isaiah 11 have been nearly emptied of Jews in this return to Palestine.

9. The Jews have fought successfully with the surrounding nations in establishing and maintaining the new state of Israel.

Sadly, some elements of the Christian church have ignored or participated in the persecution of God's special covenantal people, the Jews. Yet Romans 9-11 exhorts Christians never to rejoice in the misfortunes of the Jews. To do so brings shame to the church and to our Lord.

As we look at God's hand in the history of Israel it may seem fierce to us, for at least two reasons: first, we regularly ignore the biblical teaching that there is a life beyond this one, and that in the last judgment with its rewards and punishments everything will be made right, and no one will get less than he or she deserves; and second we regularly minimize our own sin, blaming our actions on circumstances and environment. Whatever may be the faults of our parents, teachers, or society, God will apportion to them (and us!) exactly what we deserve—unless we accept the offer of God's forgiveness through believing on Christ as our personal Savior.

Are all the predictions we have listed trivial? Did they just happen by chance? Or is the God of the Bible indeed the One who controls history and who announces the end from the beginning? The decision is yours.